

NHI Screening Guidance for Gray Wolf

Representation of Wolf EOs within the NHI Portal

Wolf element occurrences (EOs) within the NHI Data Portal are represented **solely as den sites**. Den sites represent specific locations used for breeding and are perhaps the most critical portion of gray wolf habitat in the Great Lakes region and are thus given special attention. Wolf den EOs are generalized to 40 acres – more precise information can be obtained from the DNR wolf biologist or the Natural Heritage Inventory Program. The following is guidance on how to handle projects that occur within or near wolf den site EOs when they are identified during a NHI Screening review.

Den Site Identification and Protection.



Active Season for Den Sites: mid-March – mid-June

Habitat: Vegetation at den site varies in the Great Lakes region, but excavated dens most commonly occur in conifer or mixed conifer/hardwoods stands, with semi-open to closed canopies. Most dens are located near water; usually within 100 to 200 m (110-220 yds.)

Description: Dens are usually dug in middle to late March, although sometimes females will dig at the dens in the fall. Females begin to remain near the den area about 3 weeks before the pups are born. Pups are born from the second week of April until late April. Wolves move pups from den sites to rendezvous sites from mid-May to early or mid-June. ***Therefore, den sites are used by wolves from mid-March to mid-June.***

Excavations into the soil are the most commonly used wolf dens, but wolves also use hollow logs, beaver lodges, the base of hollow trees, pit excavations, and rock caves. Wolves either excavate their own dens or enlarge dens from other mammals. Den openings generally are 36 to 63 cm in diameter (14-25 inches) and are oval in shape. In Alaska, large holes at den sites (those used by adult wolves) average 42 ± 9 cm in height and 51 ± 13 cm in width. Depth into the dens range from 1.5 - 5.5 m (5-18ft).

Den site usage can vary greatly. Dens in forested areas may be used for 6 years or more. Often territories have more than one den and occupancy varies from year to year. Wolves sometimes move their pups from one den to another and as many as four dens may be occupied in 1 season. Generally only 1 or 2 dens are used per year, and movements to new dens may be associated with disturbances.

Rendezvous Site Identification and Protection.

Active Season for Rendezvous Sites: mid-May – mid-October

Habitat: Rendezvous sites are generally open areas of grass or sedge adjacent to wetlands. The sites are characterized by extensive matted vegetation, numerous trails, and beds usually at the forest edge. Rendezvous sites are often adjacent to bogs or occur in semi-open stands of mixed conifer-hardwoods adjacent to swamps. Sometimes abandoned beaver ponds are used as rendezvous sites.

Description: Rendezvous sites are the home sites or activity sites used by wolves after the denning period, and prior to the nomadic hunting period of fall and winter. Pups are brought to the rendezvous sites from dens when they are weaned, and remain at rendezvous sites until the pups are old enough to join the pack on their hunting circuits. Rendezvous site may be associated with food sources such as ungulate kills or berry patches. Generally a series of rendezvous sites are used by a specific pack. Rendezvous sites are mostly used from mid-June to late-September, but use may start as early as mid-

May and may continue to early or mid-October. Some intermittent use of rendezvous sites may continue into the fall. It appears that the average number of rendezvous sites used by wolf packs is 4-6.

Although den and rendezvous sites each serve separate functions for wolves, they are sometimes used interchangeably. Excavations sometimes occur at rendezvous sites and these may be used as den sites in the future. Sometimes rendezvous sites may represent old den site areas. Therefore, a site used as a rendezvous site one year, could be used as a den site the next year or vice versa. Due to the transient use of rendezvous sites, special protections are not necessary. If recent excavations are observed indicating possible use as a den site, protocols in place for den site protection should be followed.

Screening Guidance for Gray Wolf

The following guidance should be followed by DNR staff if a gray wolf comes up when conducting an ER Review in the NHI Portal. Keep in mind that a wolf EO is a terrestrial species and will only show up in your EO summary if it is within 1 mile of your project area.

Step 1: Determine if there is a den within 0.5 miles of your project

Federal gray wolf avoidance is based on den locations, so if a gray wolf comes up in a portal search, we need to determine if there is a den in or near the project. If the den is greater than 0.5 miles from your project, there are no restrictions.

Step 2: Find out if the den site may be impacted by the project

If the project is within 0.5 mile, contact the Assistant Carnivore biologist, [Jane Wiedenhoeff](#), to determine if the project activities may negatively impact the den.

The following guidance will be used depending on whether the den site is known to be active along with timing of the project and work being done.

- **0-330 feet from den.** Ground disturbing activity is prohibited at any time of year. *Please note that ground disturbing activities include cutting of trees, prescribed burning, trail creation/maintenance, use of heavy equipment.*
- **330 feet – 0.5 mile (2,640 feet) from den.** Ground disturbing activity is prohibited from March 1 to July 31 to protect the pups.

* In many cases the exact location of the den site will be unknown. However, if it is known and found to be inactive, then it is recommended to search within the 330 ft. buffer for another active den, as it is possible an alternate den may be in use nearby. Some evidence that a den site is no longer active includes no sign of recent tracks, scat, or digging.

Report all actively used wolf den sites to the DNR wolf program. If a den is found during routine field work, while it is actively being used (early April to mid June), obtain a GPS location, and if available take a digital photo of the den, but leave the den area right away after collecting this data. Intense investigations of den and rendezvous site would be conducted only after wolves have discontinued use for the year

Step 3: Contact the FWS if your project may impact a den and can't follow the time of year restrictions

Contact Phil Delphey with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Phil_Delphey@fws.gov or 612-725-3548 ext. 206 before proceeding with the project.